Booth's Rock Trail

Man and the Algonquin Environment

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Booth's Rock Trail

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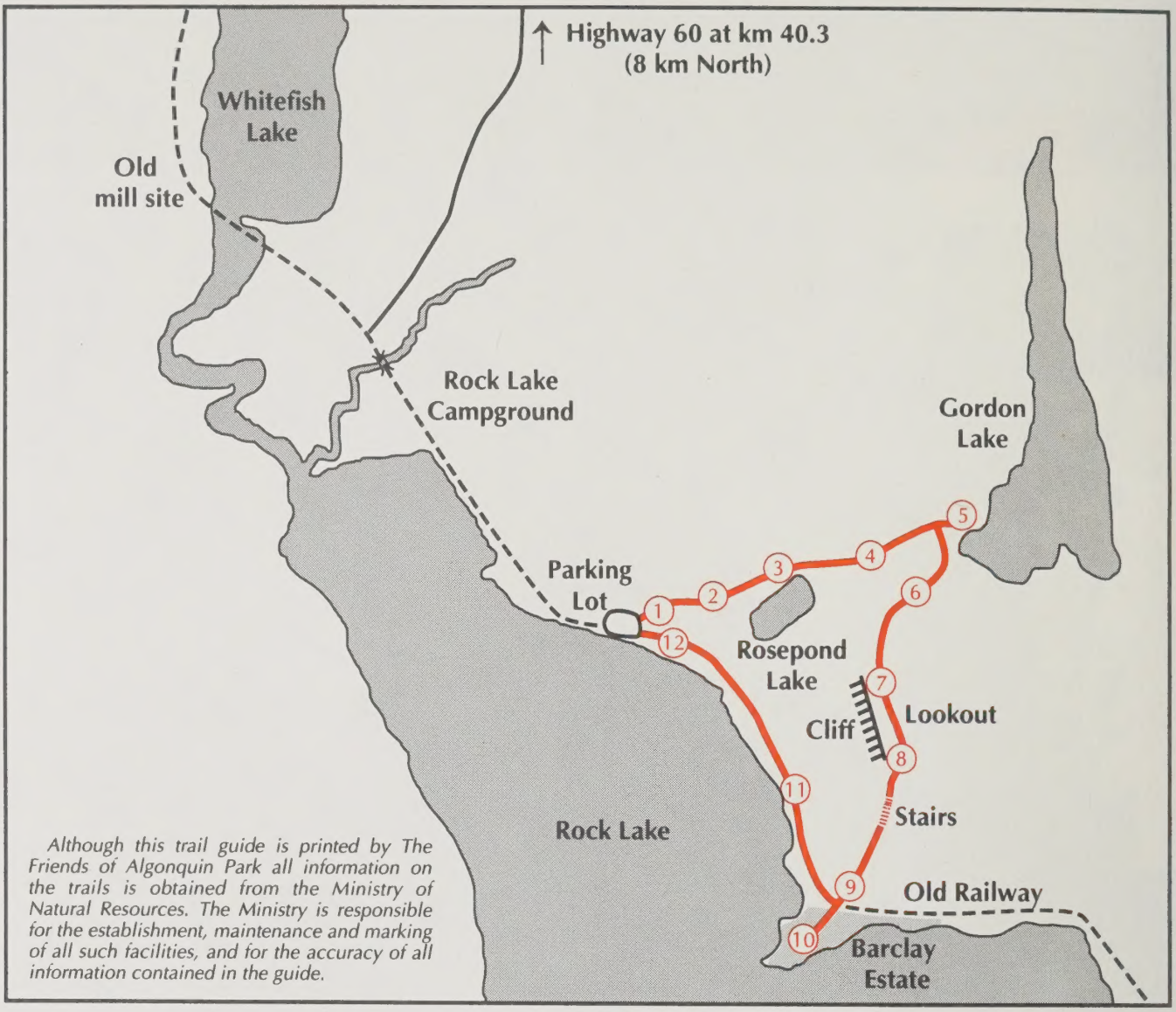


Booth's Rock Trail starts one kilometre south of the Rock Lake Campground office. After skirting two small lakes, it climbs to the top of a large cliff known as Booth's Rock, descends the far side of the lookout and loops back to the starting point. The trail is 5.1 km long and fairly rigorous, but may be easily covered in a couple of hours by an active person. From the cliff top you will have a magnificent view of Rock and Whitefish lakes and several hundred square kilometres of Algonquin Park will lie before you.

The numbered sections of this guide correspond to the numbered posts along the trail and discuss some of the ways we humans have altered the Algonquin environment.

Post 1 We've Remodelled the Old Place

Many people imagine that upon reaching Algonquin Park, they are entering a completely natural environment. To be sure, the air, water, and forests are far more natural here than in the regions where most of us live. You would be mistaken, however, to think that we humans have not played a major role in shaping today's Algonquin Park.

If you wonder what is "man-made" about the forests of Algonquin you might be astonished by photographs taken here around the turn of the century. They reveal the shrubby aftermath of earlier logging and subsequent uncontrolled forest fires. Indeed, our Park forests are not always the product of thousands of years of natural development. In many cases they are young forests less than a century old and by no means identical to the ones destroyed or modified by man. What is more, virtually every living thing in Algonquin has been affected by these man-caused changes.

Some forms of life have disappeared entirely and others are completely new — unknown in the Park before the coming of the white man.

Much of Algonquin looked like this in the early 1900s.

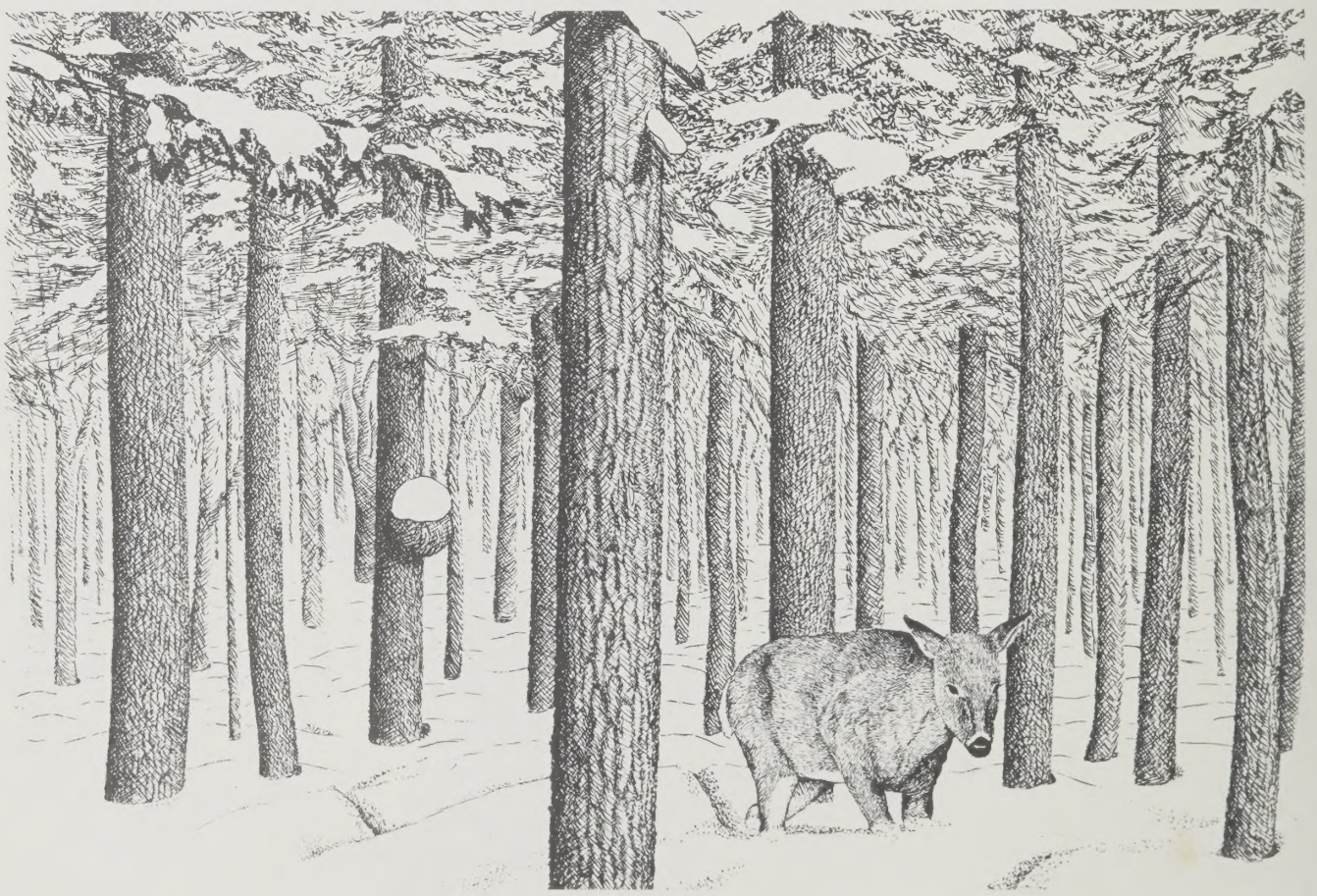
Post 2 Of Deer, Men, and Hemlocks

The shelter of these hemlocks is a good place to stop and think about deer, men and hemlocks — three living things whose stories are very much interwoven in Algonquin Park.

It comes as a great surprise to most people to learn that 200 years ago deer were quite rare in Algonquin Park. There were moose and very likely caribou, but deer could not thrive in the natural forests of Algonquin. There was too little food growing in the shade of the old mature forests to sustain them, especially in winter when deep snow severely restricts their movements.

When the white man arrived, things began to change. Although fires (started by lightning) had always been a natural part of the Algonquin environment, the loggers started many more fires. These were particularly devastating because of the flammable pine slash left by the lumbermen, and large areas were ravaged. Sunlight could now reach the old forest floor and a new shrubby forest clothed the land. White-tailed Deer thrived on the new growth and spread northward along with the lumbermen. They had only one serious barrier to overcome — our snowy winters. Deer were native to southern forests with little snow where their short legs were adequate for getting about. However, here in the north deer frequently get bogged down in deep snows and not infrequently starve to death because they can't get to food. It is primarily under the cover of coniferous trees, especially hemlocks like those around you here, that the snow is not as deep and the deer can move around and feed. This shelter made the difference between success and failure for deer in Algonquin.

We will always have deep snow in winter but will there always be food and cover in quantities sufficient for the White-tailed Deer? There cannot be much doubt that the Park forests are becoming more mature and therefore less suitable for deer. Major fires are largely a thing of the past and under modern management practices



Deer have a hard time in the deep snow of an Algonquin winter.

logging provides less food for deer than it did formerly.

At the same time, the cover-providing hemlocks, so important for the winter survival of deer, have diminished in the Park. While we now preserve the hemlock stands which are most frequently used as winter deer yards, many other stands were cut earlier and they are not easily regenerated. Deer themselves are fond of browsing on young hemlocks — the very trees which could in the future provide vital winter cover for their descendants.

In fact, deer have decreased drastically since 1960 and unless there are major disturbances in the Algonquin forests their future here is far from assured. Considering that White-tailed Deer are not native here, would their disappearance necessarily be bad? Or, would it be preferable that parts of the Park be heavily cut and burned by man in order to create ideal deer conditions once again?

Post 3 Say Goodbye?

We have always found Rosepond Lake to be particularly intimate and enchanting. Hidden away from the rest of the planet by its whispering cordon of gaunt and lonely Black Spruce, the little lake lives a life of its own. The delicate orchids and the cool, deep moss near the water's edge, the basking frogs, and the furtive schools of minnows all seem to be as remote and secure from man's troubled world as they could possibly be.

And yet, the truth is that Rosepond Lake is not nearly so safe as it may appear. Our highly industrialized North American societies smelt ores and burn coal and oil in enormous quantities. The trouble is that we try to get rid of the smoke and gases created by these processes by sending them up tall smoke stacks. The pollutants may indeed travel hundreds of kilometres from their sources but eventually they do come back to earth. Usually they are washed out of the sky by rain and snow — which is why, even here in Algonquin Park, the rain is usually so acidic that no fish could live in it.

The only thing that has saved our park lakes so far is their ability to neutralize the acid rain that falls into them. The worry is that this ability might get used up and the actual acidification of our lakes would follow. This danger has diminished thanks to new U.S. and Canadian air pollution controls but some sensitive lakes can still be overwhelmed, at least temporarily, and damaged by acidic meltwater when the snow melts each spring.

It would truly be a tragedy if levels of acid rain and snow were permitted to

increase. Fully 48,000 lakes in Ontario, including hundreds here in Algonquin are sensitive enough that very little would be needed to push them over the edge and down the path to outright acidification. It wouldn't matter then that Rosepond Lake seems to be remote and cut off from the rest of the world. It would die all the same because of man-made pollution originating far away. Are we prepared to say goodbye to the living Rosepond Lake?

Post 4 A Farm in the Forest

It takes some imagination to picture grazing cattle and crops of vegetables in the clearings between here and Gordon Lake which lies ahead, but so it was a half century ago. There was even an orchard near the lake. This little farm was part of the Barclay Estate which you will be visiting farther along the trail.

Post 5 Man Has Changed Gordon Lake

The main trail turns to the right here and goes up the hill but why not take the short path straight ahead and spend a few minutes at Gordon Lake?

This lake, like many others in the southern part of Algonquin, is now home to the Smallmouth Bass, a fish that was deliberately introduced here in the early 1900s. The addition of such a celebrated game fish to Park waters might seem to be an improvement. Unfortunately, Smallmouth Bass, in every one of the lakes where we have put them, have also caused the disappearance of Brook Trout. Even if you are a confirmed bass fisherman, you will have to concede that North America has many more bass lakes than trout lakes. In the broader scheme of things, therefore, it hardly makes sense to wipe out scarce Brook Trout fisheries merely to have a few more Smallmouth Bass lakes — particularly when our cold Algonquin waters are not particularly suitable for growing bass in the first place.

And, perhaps most important of all, if we are really serious about preserving a natural environment in a place like Algonquin Park, should we condone the introduction of non-native species like Smallmouth Bass? Should we humans willingly play a role in the destruction of part of the original Park ecosystem and its replacement by something new and unnatural?

Post 6 To Catch a Wolf

For many years a tree standing by the trail near here was encircled by a piece of rusting wire. The wire was part of a wolf snare set by a ranger many years ago. When Algonquin Park was established in 1893 protection was given to most of the Park's animals. However, wolves were considered vermin, even by most conservationists. The object of wolf management at that time was their extermination, and snares were set throughout the Park. Although some 50 to 60 wolves were killed every year, their numbers remained relatively stable. In 1958 the Ministry of Natural Resources began a program of research into the life of the Timber Wolf. This, and other recent work, has helped to clear away many of the fantasies told about wolves and to establish that they are a fascinating and natural part of the environment.

This knowledge came too late to save the wolf from extinction in much of the world. Even today, wolves are protected in only a handful of places and they are gone or vanishing from most of their former range in Europe, Asia, and North America. Today, Algonquin Park is one of the last accessible places where the wolf can be said to be common. Even so, you probably will not see one, but if you are here in August you may hear a pack. It was discovered in the wolf research program that wolves will howl in answer to human imitations of their voice. Every August we make a special effort to locate a pack near the highway and then take visitors to hear them. The response of Park visitors to these "Public Wolf Howls" leaves little doubt that the wolf itself is converting its deadly enemy — man — into its most appreciative listener.

Two Park rangers from the old days with dead wolf.

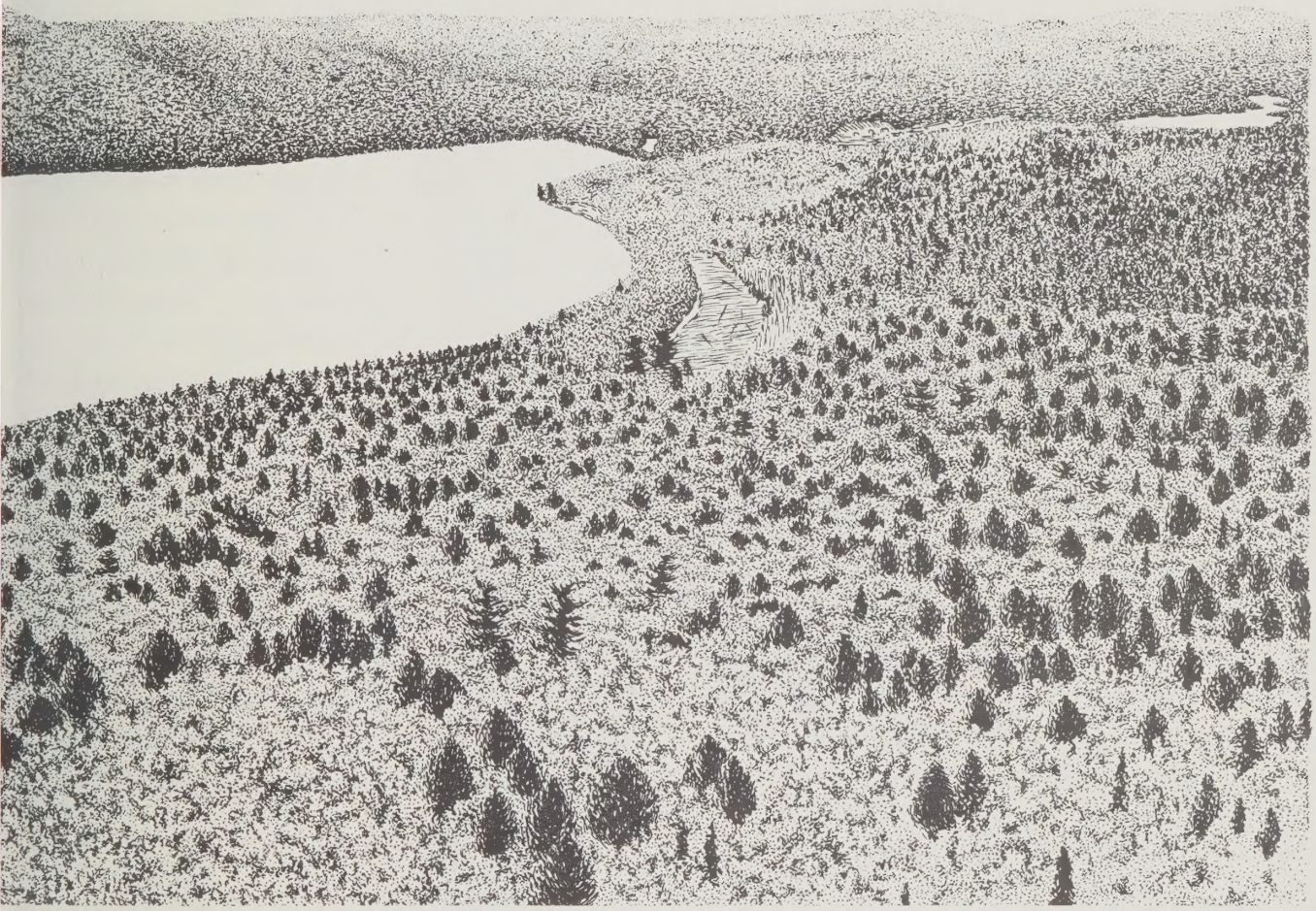
Rock Lake

Post 7 We are in the Picture

Many Park visitors make an annual trip up here to marvel at the spectacular view of the Algonquin landscape. In fact, the view is so breathtaking, and so different from what you see back home, that many people assume that the country stretching out to the horizon is "primeval wilderness". But however wild the landscape may seem, there are reminders even here of man's enormous influence.

At the foot of Whitefish Lake, for example, not far from the Rock Lake Campground, a sawmill operated until 1979. Although it was replaced that year by a new mill in the village of Whitney, the wood used still comes from Algonquin Park, transported by truck on over 1500 km of interior logging roads. Logging has been going on in Algonquin for well over a century and the forests we see today are different as a result of this activity. One notable difference is that almost all of the giant White Pine which used to tower above the smaller hardwood trees are now gone.

But today's forestry practices have changed from the old days when loggers had almost a free hand to take whatever they wanted and no one gave a thought to the consequences. Now, the approximately three quarters of Algonquin Park zoned for timber production is under forest manage-



Campground **Old mill site** **Whitefish Lake**

ment. This is a responsibility of the Ministry of Natural Resources and its aim is to establish future crops of commercially valuable trees and to see that they are cut in such a way that a new crop of valuable trees will succeed the cut ones as quickly as possible. In this way it is hoped that the managed forests of Ontario will continue to produce the same high volume of forest products forever. Algonquin Park accounts for 20 percent of the total timber production of southern Ontario.

Logging is one influence we humans have on Algonquin Park and simply coming to enjoy it is another. Every year more than 50,000 people travel on Algonquin's waterways (including Rock Lake, 120 metres below you) and such large numbers inevitably mean a considerable impact on the Park's portages and campsites. For example, the annual bill for cleaning up the garbage left by interior travellers went above $100,000 a long time ago, and that is one of the reasons why cans and bottles are now banned in the Park Interior.

So, even if the country spread out below you is beautiful and spectacular, it cannot be called wilderness. We humans have been, and still are, very much in the picture.

Post 8 No Park is an Island

Peregrine Falcon, presently extinct as a breeding bird in Algonquin

The scenery up here is great but something is missing. Up until the early 1960s you might have found a nesting pair of Peregrine Falcons in residence on this and other similar cliffs in Algonquin. Back then you could have stood here and marvelled at the fantastic aerial displays of this most magnificent of birds — towering dives, dramatic cliff-length barrel rolls, figure eights — all at incredible speed.

These wonderful sights cannot be seen now and may never be seen again from this spot because we humans have all but annihilated the once proud falcon in North America. We did it by pouring DDT on our crops, not realizing that the DDT or its equally poisonous breakdown products are very long lasting and, when eaten by an animal, tend to stay in that animal's body permanently. Small birds from Algonquin and even more remote areas became contaminated when they spent the winter in southern areas where DDT was being used intensively. When they flew north, the small birds took the poison with them in their bodies so that even in places like Algonquin (where little or no DDT was ever used) a falcon could not avoid eating pesticides. Even worse was the fact that with every meal, the Peregrine got (and

therefore kept) the entire load of DDT that the prey had taken a whole lifetime to accumulate in its body.

Falcons were not killed outright by the rapidly increasing poison levels in their bodies, but the concentration usually did reach the point where the females could not lay normal eggs. The shells became so thin that the eggs were broken before the eggs could hatch. The adults ceased to reproduce, and the falcon seemed doomed in most of North America. Fortunately, two small breeding groups were kept alive in captivity in both the U.S. and Canada, and in 1969 the use of DDT was drastically curtailed. By the late 1970s pesticide levels in traditional prey species had dropped to the point where reintroduction of the Peregrine back into their former range could be contemplated using birds from the captive breeding stocks. Algonquin was one of the places chosen to do this and, from 1977 to 1986, 64 young falcons were raised to independence on several Park cliffs. Results from the overall program have been encouraging. Although none of our young birds have been proven to survive to adulthood, a few exceptional individuals raised elsewhere in North America have lived to become breeders, and are now turning out more young falcons without any further help from us humans. Little by little many of the Peregrine's former nesting cliffs are being reclaimed and we hope that one day they will be back in Algonquin as well.

In earlier editions of this booklet we worried that the Common Loon would follow the Peregrine Falcon into local extinction because its eggs were also becoming thinner-shelled. Now, with the reduction in DDT use, this threat seems to have eased — only to be replaced by another one. The acid rain we discussed back at Post 3 could have serious consequences for Park loons because, of course, without fish, there would be no hope for loons....

Such a dismal possibility has not come about yet and we hope it never does. The unthinkable did occur with the Peregrine Falcon, however, and it would be a tragic mistake if people assumed that wildlife will live happily ever after in our "wilderness" parks no matter what we do elsewhere on our continent. The truth is that there are no havens at all from the dangers of long-lived pesticides and airborne chemical pollution.

The loon's food supply could be threatened by acid rain.

Post 9

You have now made your way back to Rock Lake and are standing directly opposite the entrance to the old Barclay Estate. The main trail turns to the right here but we invite you to take a few minutes to walk around the old estate grounds and enjoy some of the history of the place.

Post 10 Here Lived the Judge

Men-wah-tay, the caretaker's house at the Barclay estate.

Judge George Barclay was a relative of J.R. Booth, a lumberman responsible for much of the early logging we have been discussing along the trail. The estate was established here around the turn of the century and was occupied for the last time in the summer of 1953. Slowly the scene is being taken over again by forest, but the foundations of the various houses and storage sheds may be discovered with ease. The dock and tennis court are in remarkably good repair.

The gardeners among you will feel at home on these grounds. Many plants such as Day-lilies, Norway Spruce and lilacs still grow here. These plants are familiar to city backyards, but they are hardly a part of the original Algonquin environment. The truth is that over 200 alien plants have been introduced to the Park by man. In fact, along the highway during the summer, a majority of the conspicuous flowers are European species accidentally introduced to North America by man. Once again we don't have to look far to see examples of how we humans have brought about striking changes to the Park environment.

Post 11 All Aboard!

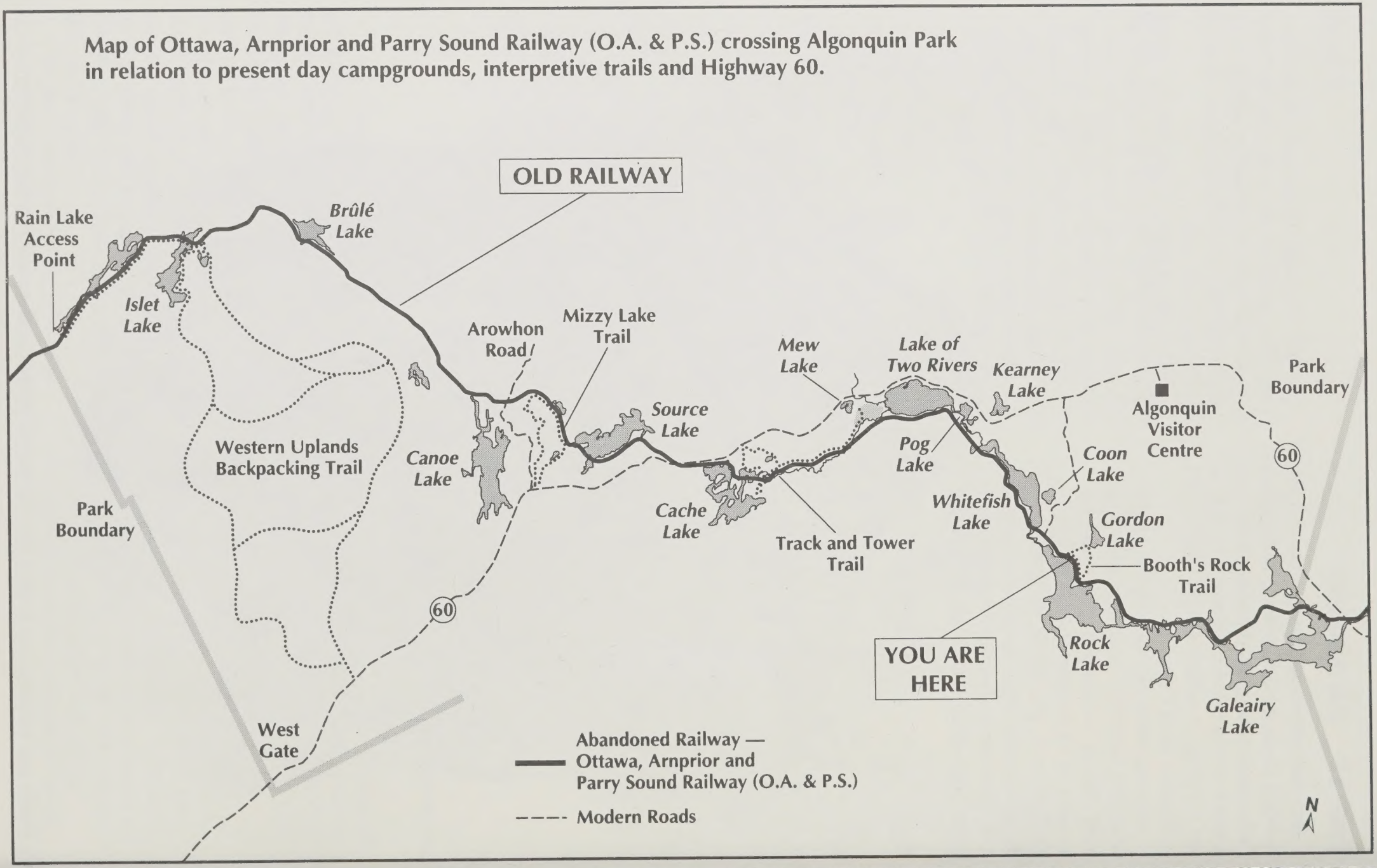
For the last few minutes you have been walking on an historic feature of Algonquin Park and a striking example of man's impact on Algonquin. Believe it or not, you are standing on what was once the busiest railroad in all of Canada!

Let your mind slip back to the 1890s when the railroad was being constructed from Ottawa to Georgian Bay under the impetus of Algonquin's most famous lumber baron, J.R. Booth. Picture men dynamiting the rockcut, and the struggle with sand and gravel required to build these steep-sided track beds. Picture the countless locomotives steaming down the track hauling timber from Algonquin Park or grain from western Canada. During World War I it is said there was a train every twenty minutes.

Today, the scene is quite different. Until 1974 trains still came once a week as far as Whitney 15 km back down the track, but this section, the one you are now standing on, has not been used since 1944. Even so, it will take generations for the track to be completely grown over, and the rockcuts will be obvious long after that.

J.R. Booth and his two sons inspect special load of square timber from the Park in 1924.

Map of Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway (O.A. & P.S.) crossing Algonquin Park in relation to present day campgrounds, interpretive trails and Highway 60.



Post 12

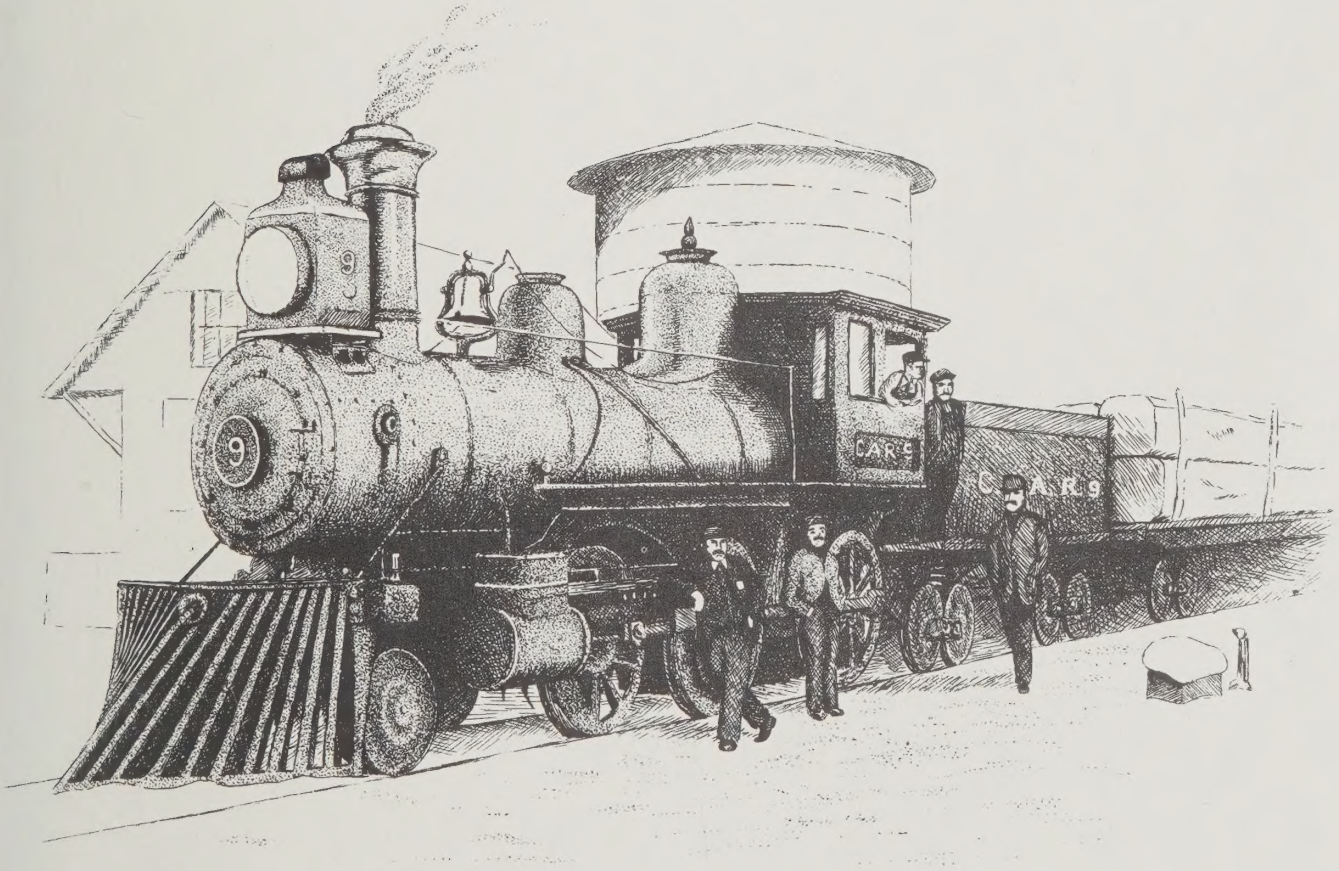
Railways, lilacs, acid rain, poisoned birds, snared wolves, old farms, logging, and garbage are not the characteristics of a wilderness. Rather, they are indicators of the ways we human beings have been changing the Algonquin environment for the last 150 years.

Today, Algonquin is managed as an area of outstanding recreational opportunities and as a valuable source of timber upon which the economy of the Park region is largely dependent.

We hope you have enjoyed your hike around the trail and that you will appreciate better the role we humans have played and are playing in Algonquin Provincial Park.

If you do not intend to take this guide home with you please put it in the box at this post so that others may use it later. If you wish to keep the guide, please pay at the trail entrance sign if you have not already done so. Thank you.

Other Algonquin trails are listed on the back cover.



Other Algonquin Park Trails

This is just one of 13 interpretive trails maintained in the Parkway Corridor of Algonquin Provincial Park. Each is designed to introduce you to some specific aspect of the Park and each has a guide similar to this one. The 12 other trails are listed below (distances are from the West Gate).

WHISKEY RAPIDS TRAIL (AT KM 7.2) This trail is a 2.1 km loop leading along the Oxtongue River to scenic Whiskey Rapids. The trail guide discusses the ecology and history of an Algonquin river.

HARDWOOD LOOKOUT TRAIL (AT KM 13.8) This 0.8 km walk introduces you to the ecology of a typical Algonquin hardwood forest and culminates in a fine view of Smoke Lake and the surrounding hills.

MIZZY LAKE TRAIL (AT KM 15.4) This 11 km trail requires an early start and a full day to do properly. It visits nine ponds and small lakes and affords some of the best chances to see wildlife in the Parkway corridor.

PECK LAKE TRAIL (AT KM 19.2) The Peck Lake Trail is 1.9 km long and goes completely around the shoreline of Peck Lake before returning you to the parking lot. The trail guide explores the ecology of Algonquin lakes.

TRACK AND TOWER TRAIL (AT KM 25) A 7.7 km loop featuring a spectacular lookout over Cache Lake, this trail introduces you to some fascinating history. A 5.5 km side trip follows an abandoned railway to Mew Lake.

HEMLOCK BLUFF TRAIL (AT KM 27.2) This 3.5 km loop leads through mixed forest to an impressive view of Jack Lake. The guide discusses research in Algonquin.

BAT LAKE TRAIL (AT KM 30) This 5.6 km loop introduces you to basic Park ecology while visiting a beautiful hemlock stand, a fine lookout, and acidic Bat Lake.

TWO RIVERS TRAIL (AT KM 31) This 2.1 km loop includes an easy ascent to a pine-clad cliff and introduces the importance of change in the natural forests of Algonquin.

CENTENNIAL RIDGES TRAIL (2 KM SOUTH FROM KM 37.6) This very demanding 10 km loop affords spectacular viewing along two high ridges. The guide discusses contributions of selected people to the Park over its first century.

LOOKOUT TRAIL (AT KM 39.7) This 1.9 km loop is a fairly steep and rugged trail which rewards the hiker with a magnificent view of several hundred square kilometres of Algonquin. The trail guide discusses Park geology.

SPRUCE BOG BOARDWALK (AT KM 42.5) Several boardwalk sections in this 1.5 km loop give you an excellent close-up look at two typical northern bogs. The guide discusses their ecology.

BEAVER POND TRAIL (AT KM 45.2) A 2.0 km loop yields excellent views of two beaver ponds while the guide provides an introduction to Algonquin's fascinating beaver pond ecology.

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